

Sense of Belonging: a matter of unity within diversity

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St. Maarten found itself in the lucky circumstance that one is located at a great distance from Willemstad, so that the involvement and the interference of the Central Antillean Government in the 80's and 90's were low. As a result, the island pursues a development that presented visitors of the other ABC Islands with a *fait accompli*. The Administration for a long time focused on the tourism industry, without dedicating the necessary attention – because of the lack of a budget - to the social-cultural sector. Due to the economic development a great amount of emigrants of the Lesser Antilles moved to the main island and thanks to the absorption capacity of St. Maarten one could cope so far with the pressure on the infrastructure. The island acquired since 10-10-2010 a country status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and cherishes the independence on the longer term. St. Maarten is confronting different challenges for the coming years, both for its own citizens and for the immigrant community. Lacking the necessary policy-instruments one must be creative to address the different phenomena in the local community.

Diversity

The population of St. Maarten is quite heterogeneous and consists next to large extent inhabitants with a Dutch nationality (51%), to which emigrants from the Leeward Islands also belong, from migrants from the surrounding islands.¹ These immigrants moved because of the political, social, or economic situation to St. Maarten to build a new future. Close to their native island and with the possibility to return in order to maintain family relations. Thanks to the arrival of immigrants one has influence on economic activities and population growth. Although most of them come from the English-speaking Islands, they choose as usual to be part of their own language community. Language is the most important pillar of one's identity. On the working place one has more contact with other colleagues of the other islands, whereby still the mutual social-cohesion is still fragile.

On the labor market we obtain an image that e.g. most Dominicans (40-50%) are employed in the hospitality industry, 20% of the male population in the construction sector, and nearly 20% in enterprises as salons. Within the public sector you will find especially immigrants from Dominica, Guyana, St. Lucia, St. Kitts as civil servants, but then in the lower echelons. Which also means that 95% of the better positions on middle-and higher level are reserved for the St. Maarteners? The ratio between local and immigrants is estimated at 35,3 %² which calls for a community policy. Only after many years of socialization and build up its own network, consisting of neighbors, friends, colleagues with different nationalities, one is prepared to leave the own language group as a guardrail and blend into a larger context. In case there is almost no flow that takes place in education and labor market that benefits the migrant population, the resulting effect is that there is little question of patriotism for the country of St. Maarten. One experiences himself just as an alien, like an outsider on the friendly island of St. Maarten and experience apart from the labour and income resulting there from nothing that connects them with the island.

Sense of belonging

Islanders have a strong tendency to protect their own culture and are therefore capable to form a 'sense of belonging' of its own. One considers its own group as the primary network where they belong to and can appeal to in case of any distress. The different groups are living in a peaceful coexistence next to each other and identify themselves in the English language in addition to Dutch as the official language. The question of belonging is the central aspect - by our way of speaking, thinking, dressing, eating, consumption behavior etc. - in the definition

¹ Dominican Republic, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis & Trinidad and Tobago.

² Census 2011.

how we want to be perceived in society: like a Grenadian, Barbadian, Haitian or Dominicano? In addition, it is very common that in one's own group, e.g. the Dominicans speak Spanish and cook their meals according to own recipes. The same you see likewise with the Haitians, with the difference that these immigrants rapidly absorbed in the mass due to apply the national language in their communications. With the Dominicans we can find that they invariably express in Spanish, because in their conception they own a language which is superior to the local language, which is also an international language. As the groups become more and more powerful, and form a significant political factor, they start to put some claims forward. This also explains why the one has a radio-and TV-program in their own language and the other not. It is not clear what's the impact of the ethnic mobility among these groups and to what extent they are part of the public administration, education and other relevant sectors, in order to determine their role in society.

As their stay is longer on the island, one can appeal to the Dutch nationality Law³ and serves as a full-fledged citizen to be considered. One of the changes that the Netherlands nationality entails is that one can participate in the parliamentary elections and be elected as Member of Parliament. This implies for the future that immigrants are offered equal opportunities to a job in the private and public sector. If members of a migrant group belong to the entrepreneurial class, no barriers to their business may be raised instead of creating a favorable business environment to conduct their business. At first, this type of process carried out may encounter resistance, especially in a small scale economy, but it is part of a changing society and the new reality. One will not easily accept that others will hold their job and position, but beyond that we must realize that they too have educated themselves by training to fulfill these roles. The tensions which may manifest on the labor market is a direct consequence of the way locals perceive this transition, while generation after generation was blinded by the luxury and less interested in updating their level of education.

Inclusion and exclusion

Generally we see that economic progress brings prosperity that translates in a sense of nationalism and result into political demands. In the case of the Aruban struggle for a Separate Status during the period 1971-1986, we can observe that a great job was done with the high-skilled immigrants - replacing the Dutch civil servants - who was head of the various government departments such as justice, economics, aviation, finance , which after 1986 were replaced by the newly qualified native Arubans. This process was supported by the debate Ken ta Arubiano/who is defacto an Arubian which in 1990 was cranked up. In St. Maarten, one also seems to make a distinction between: 1. St. Maarteners whose both parents are born on the island; 2. St. Maarteners which 1 parent is born there; and 3. St. Maarteners who have lived for a short duration or long-time abroad. This fact leads to the observation that it is not easy to speak about patriotism, even though between the 3 categories distinction - mostly an emotional – is made. On the other hand, immigrants based on their economic status, background and country of origin-the distinction between the small-and larger islands – and gender are treated differently than those who come from the larger islands Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad & Tobago.

Also their own citizen that remained for short or long period of time abroad, run the risk of becoming as second-class St. Maartenaar or to be treated as a foreigner. Being a citizen – unlike a migrant – implies one has a legally tie with the state which brings a level of participation and responsibilities. As previously argued the individual is able to develop his own form of strategy, deploys his social network he belongs to opens ' closed doors '. In that respect, the (composition of) the identity and whether or not he belongs to a community, must be seen as a step in the integration process. The choices for emancipation are a resultant of the offered space and opportunity in the society in which one lives. If the doors stays closed with a minimum of opportunity for the next generation, then there is no sense of belonging to be achieved. In the St. Maarten-case a policy based on a distinction – according to the international law rule – between the *ius sanguinici* (those born out of St. Maarteners parents)

³ Articles 7 and 8 of the Dutch Nationality Law govern the eligibility and requirements for naturalization.

and the *ius soli* (immigrants born on the soil of St. Maarten) will not contribute to the inclusion of these migrant groups in the integration process.

Cultural policy

In order to absorb the shock movements in society, policy must respond in a timely manner. Cultural policy in the future must be conducted as an Open window policy, in the sense that there is more space created in the public domain for migrant groups. On the other hand, policies should be directed at strengthening the own cultural values and national identity of the St. Maartenaar, and on the other hand, create the necessary space to accommodate the existing groups. This means that projects and activities will have to include representatives from these groups. The point is to involve them as a group to participate in the process of preparation, discussing and execute responsibilities of a National holiday. Or that the various Caribbean immigrants groups lay a wreath at the Frontier Rock Wall. In this way, the isolation of the individual – society is nullified and is devoting them to the process of inclusion. On a micro-level both locals and migrant can further in the integration process by identifying themselves with the history and heroes of the island. In this context, the existence of statues and monuments are of great importance and should have names like Inez Eliza Baly-Lewis (1902-1990), Joseph H. Lake (1925-1976), Nina Larmonie-Duverly (1919-1982) -to name a few - immortalized.

The cohesion power of Literature

The St. Maarten literature came in the late 1980s well underway to give a boost to the cultural life. In this process the House of Nehesi Publishers (HNP) plays an important role as a catalyst of the literary events in the region. By publishing primarily work of local authors as L. Sekou, D.D. Jack, R. Arrindell, Ch. B. Hodge and many more, one has brought to life the Creole language and upgraded it as a form of expression. Together with the Conscious Lyrics Foundation a strategy was unfolded at an early stage by means of publishing non-fiction books which sparked political awareness⁴ and social cohesion. Initially it focused on publishing work by native authors, but afterwards one has widened its horizon by publishing authors of the nearby islands. With the issuing of work as that of G. Lamming and K. Brathwaite (Barbados), S. Keane (St. Vincent), M. Bethel (Bahamas), H.A. Fergus (Montserrat), F. Badejo (Nigeria), J.E. Rodriguez (Cuba) and Ch. Vicioso (Dominican Republic) HNP has strengthened both social cohesion and the sense of belonging towards the multicultural society of St. Maarten. By taking this step St. Maarten ipso facto the HNP had itself positioned in the region and play an important role.

St. Maarten, however, suffers just as many colonized countries in the Caribbean area, Asia or Africa with the phenomenon of an underdeveloped reading culture. This means that there is a long distance between the individual and the book world, a phenomenon that frequently manifests due to the Internet activities and at this time it is even more difficult to reduce its influence. With the school year 2016-2017 the HNP started with a read and write campaign among young people by means of handing out free samples of the "pioneer series" books and other titles of HNP. Interesting in the case of St. Maarten is that at the creation of the HNP one already had developed a business strategy that you barely see at other publishing houses in Aruba and Curaçao. A policy that was not only focusing on poetry and prose, but especially non-fiction books. If we reviewed the literary production then we can observe that in the new Millennium sometimes 5 (2000), 7 (2003) and even 10 (2007) books were issued per year, with an average of 3.7 books.⁵ The effects of the global credit crisis in 2007/2008 which subsequently was felt afterwards, were then clearly reflected in the book production of HNP. After 2008, the annual production adjusted to 3-4 books.

⁴ An introduction to government (L. Duzanson), The Republic of St. Martin, Friendly Anger (J. Lake Jr), Cul de Sac people (M.S. Voges), National symbols of St. Maarten (L. Sekou), Know your political history (E. Lynch e.a.), Language, culture and identity (R. Arrindell)

⁵ In the 80's and 90's the average on an annual basis was 2 books.

Cultural capital

Generally in micro-states all sorts of good initiatives and ideas which are deployed become part of a range of activities in the cultural sector. These activities are usually of short duration or are short-lived and disappear from the cultural agenda. In itself very regrettable if we consider the time investment, preparations and set up of such a project. All well meant, but over a few years there is no dynamism to continue the project. One of the reasons for this is that essentially little or insufficient centripetal forces exist in society in order to provide a proper dynamics. One has not only to do with a small population, but also with limited interest among the audience, a reserved government policy, and little attention from the media. With a more cultural policy deployment one can shape their own policy objectives in terms of identity-issues, the upliftment, and spread of culture.

The situation on St. Maarten may now be lifted to another level by promoting greater coherence between the actors. For a long time it was art and culture as an activity that had to be practiced indoors and those on the islands. So far, one regards stimulating economic growth as a social imperative, to which the cultural sector is subordinated. While the cultural sector can give a boost to the economy grow by a revaluation of the cultural facilities in the tourist industry. Between the existing facilities such as the University of St. Martin, The Philipsburg Jubilee Library, and activities like Crossing the seas, The St. Maarten Book fair, Book party should be more cooperation and cohesion to come to a high-quality product. A joining of forces is precisely the missing link to guarantee continuity and diversity of the audience.

In Aruba, we see these last years a policy change in order to make a connection between the activities in the cultural sector and those in the tourist sector. For this reason the existing cultural infrastructure must be improved and to a certain extend should be expanded. Instead, one would see a link between their own people and the mass tourists who annually visit the island. This means a better alignment of the activities of the Philipsburg Jubilee Library, Crossing the seas, Philipsburg Community and Cultural Center, St. Maarten Book fair on the flow of tourists that visit the island. In the long term than all kinds of connections should emerge between art institutions such as The St. Maarten Museum and Gallery, artists, writers, poets, journalists, festivals, galleries which offers St. Maarten as a product. From 16 – 18th of September 2016 the Aruba Art Fair took place with the participation of artists from abroad in a project to decorate the buildings with wall paintings, in order to commit an intervention in the built environment for local development in San Nicolas. Apart from murals are numerous objects as benches. This as an example how local artists, by employing their skills, can boost a regional economy and nurture the sense of belonging.

Conclusion

To sum up, the beacons should be transfer to a next momentum in history. In elementary- and secondary schools, pupils need to be taught about their own history and works of local authors. The cultural life should be more directed on its migrant groups, and make a connection with the local culture. Within the public administration employment opportunities must be expanded in order to increase the ethnic mobility among the immigrants. The necessary national symbols, must be created so that they can recognize themselves in it. By not adopting new policies, the chances are greater that instead of encouraging the cultural exchange, precisely the creation of new frontiers and seclusion by the migrant groups is reached. Furthermore by neglecting the social-cultural and economic factor, one might create within or outside his group their own belonging-categories and so undermining the sense of belonging.